Tobacco Packages: Ads for tobacco companies or tools for public health?

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One day in 1997...

WHAT ABOUT THE HEALTH WARNING?

CANCER, YOU IMBECILE, CANCER!

DO YOU HEAR? CANCER!

SLAP SLAP SLAP SLAP

WHY DO YOU BUY THEM FROM THAT MACHINE? THE BIG GUY AT THE DELI IS WORSE!

OH, YOU DON'T NOTICE IT AFTER A WHILE.
The Importance of the Package

• To tobacco companies:
  – Critical link between ads and product; more important as advertising is banned
Link between ads and product

- The least expensive form of advertising
- The manufacturer’s last chance at a customer
- No single factor is as important at the point of sale as the package itself.

M. Gershman, 1987

- “The answer to the question whether pack design can beat restrictions on cigarette advertising must be a very positive ‘yes.’ ”

Kevin Sheridan, representative of packaging firm supplying Canadian tobacco companies
A “badge” product

• To tobacco companies:
  – Critical link between ads and product; more important as advertising is banned
  – Cigarettes are a “badge” product
A “badge” product

“A cigarette package is unique because the consumer carries it around with him all day… it’s a part of a smoker’s clothing, and when he saunters into a bar and plunks it down, he makes a statement about himself.”

John Digianni, cigarette package designer
(Source: Wakefield et al, 2002)
Influences product perceptions

- To tobacco companies:
  - Critical link between ads and product; more important as advertising is banned
  - Cigarettes are a “badge” product
  - Creates perceptions about the product
Influences product perceptions

“The product itself…the discrimination in product terms, pure blind product terms without any packaging or name around it is very limited. You can tell if it’s very mild or very strong….But it’s very difficult for people to discriminate, blind tested. Put it in a package and put a name on it, and then it has a lot of product characteristics.”

Don Brown, Vice-President of Marketing
Imperial Tobacco, Canada
Testimony in Canadian court, 1989
Influences product perceptions

“… even with the use of panelists who are trained to be objective in their evaluation of cigarettes, that both brand identification and pack imagery variables have a significant effect on the individual’s perception of the sensory attributes of the product.”

BAT study, 1980

(Source: Wakefield et al, 2002)
The Importance of the Package

• To tobacco companies:
  – Critical link between ads and product; more important as advertising is banned
  – Cigarettes are a “badge” product
  – Creates perceptions about the product

• To the public health community:
  – An important source of health information
  – Unparalled opportunity to reach smokers
Regulatory aspects of package labelling

• Health Information
• Misleading brand descriptors
• Ingredient Information – emissions and constituents
• Markings to track and trace contraband tobacco
Smokers are not aware of or underestimate the risks of smoking:

– In Canada in 1999 (before picture-based warnings), only one-third of smokers could recall that heart attacks and emphysema are caused by smoking.

– In Cuba in the same year, 17% of doctors and 20% of nurses who smoked believed that smoking caused more benefits than harm.

– In the US in 1995 only 39% of heavy smokers believed that they had a higher risk of heart attack and only 49% believed they had a higher risk of cancer.
Informing Consumers

- **type of risk**
  - Lung cancer, gangrene, heart attack, impotence, emphysema
- **magnitude of risk**
  - One-third of all heart disease and cancer deaths are caused by tobacco use
  - Half of all smokers die from a smoking-related disease
- **consequences of risk**
  - The five-year survival rate for lung cancer is 10%; there is no cure
  - Gangrene can result in amputation
- **benefits of changing behaviour**
  - Quitting smoking at any age greatly reduces the risk of disease
Evidence from Brazil

- 54% of smokers had changed their opinion on the health consequences of smoking as a result of the warnings.
- 67% of smokers said the warnings made them want to quit.
- Impact was greater among lower income and education groups.
Evidence from Canada

- 58% of smokers thought more about the health effects of smoking as a result of the warnings
- 44% of smokers said the warnings had increased their motivation to quit
- 27% of smokers smoked less inside of their home as a result of the warnings
Brazil and Canada have inspired others.

Australia

Pan American Health Organization

Venezuela

El Ministerio de Salud y Desarrollo Social ADVIERTE
FUMAR CAUSA IMPOTENCIA EN LOS HOMBRES

Uruguay

Singapore

SMOKING CAUSES PERIPHERAL VASCULAR DISEASE
Health Authority Warning

SMOKING DAMAGES YOUR BLOOD VESSELS, WHICH CAN PREVENT BLOOD CIRCULATION, PARTICULARLY TO YOUR LEGS OR FEET. THIS CAN RESULT IN BLOOD CLOTS, INFECTION, GANGRENE, EVEN AMPUTATION.

You CAN quit smoking. Call Quitline 131 848, talk to your doctor or pharmacist, or visit www.quitnow.info.au

THAILAND

2005 Pan American Health Organization
What makes package warnings most effective?

- Large size
- Prime location
- Clear, specific, personalized content
- Images as well as text
Size

- Think of headlines versus fine print
- Larger size means higher visibility and better ability to compete with other package elements
- Perceived credibility of messages and perceived risks from tobacco use increase proportionately with increases in the size of warnings
**Location, location, location**

- Front of the pack and top of the pack are the “prime real estate” on the tobacco package

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bad</th>
<th>Better</th>
<th>Even Better</th>
<th>Best</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image1" alt="Bad Image" /></td>
<td><img src="image2" alt="Better Image" /></td>
<td><img src="image3" alt="Even Better Image" /></td>
<td><img src="image4" alt="Best Image" /></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Pan American Health Organization*
Clear, specific, personalized content

- “Smoking causes lung cancer”, not “Smoking may be dangerous to your health”
- “Smoking can kill you”, not “Smoking can kill”
- Clear, practical advice about how to quit and where to get help:
  - “ Quitting smoking today will reduce your risk of heart attack by half within a year”, not “ Quitting smoking benefits your health”
  - “Call this number to talk to someone who can help you quit”, not “ Quit now”
Images

• Text warnings combined with images are many times more effective than text-only warnings

• Images can help communicate information to people who are illiterate

• Images communicate much more emotively than text

• Images are better able to compete with the rest of the package to draw smokers’ attention to the warning
Descriptive Elements, Ingredients and Emissions
The “Light” Deception

- Tobacco companies use so-called “light” or “low-tar” tobacco products to keep smokers in the market
- These products ARE NOT any safer than “regular” tobacco products
- Many smokers believe, consciously or subconsciously, that these products are less harmful than regular cigarettes
- In mature tobacco markets, “low-tar” tobacco products have a high level of market share
What is the deception?

- “Light” labelling is based, in part, on tar, nicotine and carbon monoxide levels as measured by internationally standardized methods: ISO and FTC
- The levels are based on machine smoking with a non-variable puff rate, puff length and puff depth
- “low-tar” cigarettes do not have lower levels of substances, they have air vents in filters to dilute the inhalation of harmful substances
- Smokers are not machines: they change their smoking behaviour to get the nicotine that their body needs
Changing the measurement systems

- The International Standards Organization (ISO) has been dominated by tobacco companies and so the method continues to serve their interests.
- WHO is working with ISO to propose new international measurement standards for emissions.
WHO recommends NOT displaying ratings and banning misleading descriptors

Conclusions and Recommendations from the World Health Organization Scientific Advisory Committee on Tobacco Product Regulation (SACTob) on Health Claims Derived from ISO/FTC Method:

1. Tar, nicotine and CO ratings based upon current ISO/FTC methods and presented on cigarette packages and in advertising are misleading and should not be displayed.
2. All misleading health and exposure claims should be banned.
3. The ban should apply to packaging, brand names, advertising and other promotion activities.
4. Banned terms should include light, ultra-light, mild, and low tar.
LIGHT AND MILD
Example of Brazilian Cigarette Packages
Before the Law

Source: Cristiane Vianna, INCA
LIGHT AND MILD
Example of Brazilian Cigarette Packages
After the Law

Source: Cristiane Vianna, INCA
Source: Cristiane Vianna, INCA
UK banned use of “light” “mild” and similar terms in 2004

• UK smokers were less likely after the ban than before the ban to believe that light cigarettes are less harmful than regular cigarettes; they were also less likely to believe it compared to smokers in Canada, US and Australia.

Source: Anne Marie MacKintosh, Univ. Stirling
In summary

• The tobacco package is an incredibly valuable space that can be used to inform smokers and reduce tobacco use.

• Health warnings that are large and meaningful and include graphics are appreciated by smokers, and increase significantly smokers’ desire and attempts to quit smoking.

• Flawed ingredient testing and misleading descriptors have led smokers to falsely believe that “low-tar” and “light” cigarettes are less harmful, and have deterred many smokers from quitting.

• Removal of misleading descriptors and imagery can reduce misperceptions about these types of products.